

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Second Sunday of Easter  
March 30, 2008  
1 Peter 1:3-9

*"A Resurrection Reminder"*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

As the front of your bulletin reminds you today, we are continuing our Easter observance. The Sundays that follow Easter are known in the church as Sundays of Easter not after or in. Each Sunday is another part of the Easter celebration. The calendar of the church is fixed on Easter for the fifty days until Pentecost Sunday. We are not like so many who put away the Easter baskets or bonnets or who have eaten all the Easter candy. Easter is not something so easily put away and the Scripture readings for these Sundays of Easter remind us of that. The Gospel lesson for this week is the familiar story of Jesus and Thomas, doubting Thomas. And we will get there eventually. But we will get there through our main emphasis for today in the words of St. Peter in the Epistle. For these words which are part of the great doxology (that is, words of praise) which open his letter can serve us equally as well as a resurrection reminder. That is our theme for this day. May the Lord bless our hearing and meditation upon his word and may we focus our thoughts upon the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Blessed!

Blessed! So Peter begins. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Those words in themselves are worthy of note. Theologians have debated their meaning. Who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? According to his human nature, He is Jesus' God. According to his divine nature, He is Jesus' Father. For truly he is begotten of the Father from eternity. And the sentence which follows is one of those long and complex Greek constructions which is packed with meaning: "According to his great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." There are so many words in that sentence that are important. His great mercy ... born again ... a living hope ... an inheritance ... imperishable ... undefiled ... unfading ... and most importantly, a salvation. All those things are predicated on and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

As the last weeks have reminded us we have that salvation through the work and merit of Jesus who suffered and died for our sins and who is raised from the dead. We are born again through him. In him is a hope based not upon anything of our own doing but upon his saving work. And in him is an inheritance to a life that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Note how each of those words is a negative. The only way sometimes that our heavenly hope can be described is in contrast to the things of this world which are so often perishable and defiled and which fade away.

This past week I was reminded again of that as I visited with two people who were seriously ill, one of whom the Lord called home last Thursday. They were both members of another congregation here in the city whose pastor was out of town. It was a privilege to share the comforting words of hope in Christ our risen Lord even in the face of death itself.

## II. Facing Persecution

The middle portion of our Epistle is a reminder that the response to our faith is sometimes persecution. "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." In the first lesson, we were reminded how the disciples were commanded on the threat of punishment not to preach or speak of Jesus. The response of the disciples, most significantly, Peter, was "we must obey God rather than man." And it also states that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Are we willing to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus? Thankfully, at least in our present circumstances there is no great persecution of Christians. But the world is full of examples. There are still martyrs for the faith. And perhaps the devil and the world are using more subtle means of intimidation. Think about it for a moment and consider the ways in which the true Christian faith is derided and scorned. Or the fear and timidity of some Christians, perhaps you and I, to be bold witnesses. What will people think after all? And so it would be our prayer that our faith may be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

## III. Not Seen But Known

The closing verse of our text is a beautiful and striking link with the Gospel for today. Peter concludes by saying, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Though you have not seen him ... though you do not now see him ... Don't those words remind you of the account in the Gospel of the appearance of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room following his resurrection. Thomas was not present with the others on the first occasion when He who was dead showed Himself to be alive forevermore. He did not hear the words of greeting, the words of commissioning as the Lord prepared to send his disciples into the world, nor did he receive the Holy Spirit as bestowed by Jesus. He was not there to share the joy and the peace of the Lord.

So instead of the overwhelming joy of the other disciples, their confident witness to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord" is met with skepticism and doubt. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." Ah, doubting Thomas, how your faith needs to be strengthened so that your witness too might be strong.

And so it was that a week later, the disciples are gathered once again in the same house behind the same locked doors, but this time Thomas is with them. And once again, Jesus is there in their midst. Jesus speaks the words of greeting, "Shalom alechem -- Peace be with you." And then come the words to the doubting one, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hands and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." It is most significant that it is not recorded whether Thomas followed his Lord's command, but what is recorded is of greatest value. Doubting Thomas became in this instant Thomas the Confessor. "My Lord and my God," he said. No longer, "Master" or "Teacher" but Lord and God. What greater confession could there possibly be.

But the response of Jesus is right in line with the words of our epistle, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." Though we have not seen him, we love him ... though we do not now see him, we rejoice and are filled with an inexpressible joy. The reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is built upon the eyewitnesses who did see and the truth of the word which proclaims him. It is seen in the very existence of the Christian Church and the countless number of believers who have confessed that faith. The power of the Holy Spirit is great. The faith in the resurrection is a saving faith. "Blessed" indeed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

So we have had a resurrection reminder today. May the Lord continue to bless our Easter faith. It is still Easter. The Lord has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And the words we sang at the beginning of this service are so very true:

Jesus, my Redeemer lives;  
Likewise, I to life shall waken.  
He will bring me where He is;  
Shall my courage then be shaken?  
Shall I fear or could the Head  
Rise and leave His members dead?

Christ is risen! .... In Jesus' Name. Amen.